United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/24

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
30 November 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Salvation Army, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-61374 (E) 121211

Please recycle

Statement

The Salvation Army, an international movement and evangelical branch of the universal Christian Church, believes that all people are made in the image of God and that each person, in the eyes of God, has worth and dignity.

The Salvation Army was founded within poor communities. It identifies with and includes the poor, seeking to meet physical, material, emotional and spiritual needs. However, the Salvation Army recognizes it is society's responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to adequate resources, services and opportunities. It is necessary to safeguard the basic human rights to food, health care, shelter and clothing, as well as the rights to economic initiative, productive work, just wages and decent working conditions.

The Salvation Army has, from its inception, applied biblical principles to the social issues presented by humanity and society and to a subsequent response to these issues, and this continues to be our work.

The Salvation Army recognizes that poverty can never be completely eradicated but acknowledges its Christian responsibility to the powerless and those suffering from economic hardship.

The Salvation Army is committed to the alleviation of poverty through humanitarian aid and long-term development in those parts of the world in which it is present.

It acknowledges its responsibilities towards others and is committed to addressing the needs of people living in poverty and to speak out for the needs of the poor when Government and corporate policies could cause greater poverty, also recognizing and encouraging positive initiatives made in response to the issues.

We, the Salvation Army, welcome the 17-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations.

In 2008, the agreed conclusions from the fifty-second session reaffirmed the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including section L, whereby Governments committed to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against girls, publicly acknowledged that the advancement of women is not sustainable without attention to the rights of girls, and highlighted the importance of policies and strategies to improve the situation of those in rural areas. They also reiterated that eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world and stressed that the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals require investing adequate resources for gender equality and empowerment.

The fifty-sixth session offers the opportunity for Member States to evaluate and implement the agreed conclusions from the fifty-second session and to examine the empowerment of rural women and their role in the eradication of poverty and hunger.

We are reminded that after 17 years of national policies and international agreements to advance the rights of women, the goals of the Beijing Platform and the Millennium Development Goals still remain unachieved.

Education and work

Education is a basic human right. In many countries, girls drop out of school and become pregnant and then rely on their boyfriends for their daily needs but they themselves are uneducated and the cycle of poverty continues.

In many of the countries within which the Salvation Army operates, reports have come back that the rate of illiteracy continues to climb, especially among the women and girls in rural and village areas.

In order for women and girls to achieve a higher standard of living and to break the poverty cycle there have to be opportunities and motivation for girls to achieve acceptable levels of formal education.

Women and girls, especially those from rural communities, need educational opportunities so that they can take their place alongside women in urban settings.

The Salvation Army has found in our work in rural communities that many of the young women who drop out of school enrol themselves in centres to learn tailoring, hairdressing and other vocational skills when given the opportunity.

Job skill training for many rural women has proven to be effective, especially when they are allowed to enrol in a vocational centre to learn a trade that would not only benefit them as a person but would also benefit their family and in many cases their community.

For example, one Salvation Army programme has made a way for women to learn the trade of making soap, soap powder and pomade in order to give the women a source of income and independence.

The Salvation Army has also made it possible for women living in rural areas to take part in small-scale business by engaging in microfinance projects sponsored by the Salvation Army.

For example, the Salvation Army has worked with rural women in providing solar cookers and teaching them how to prepare meals and to boil water in amber glass bottles. Women are learning how to use the sun for making cakes and cooking different kinds of foods in these solar cookers.

This has multiple outcomes: the reduction of firewood use, the protection of the environment and the use of a safe renewable energy source. It provides an opportunity for learning, sharing and community engagement through the preparation of food.

Recommendations for the United Nations and Member States

We urge that Governments increase opportunities for rural women to be recognized and empowered.

We urge that rural women be trained through appropriate skills training programmes that would benefit them and their family and community, such as, but not limited to, microfinance and vocational training.

We urge that Governments ensure that rural women be given the same opportunity for education that women in urban settings receive.

We applaud initiatives by the United Nations and Member States that develop women's skills through development programmes.

We urge that Governments and the United Nations collaborate and work with faith-based organizations that are already working with rural women to achieve substantive outcomes.